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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of providing feedback (results of how frequently a variety of tasks had been performed) on the job satisfaction of Dental Therapy Assistants (DTA's) during the course of several levels of training, i.e., up to three months, four to nine months and 10 to 18 months. Trainees were predominantly females. Findings indicated that longer training was related to higher levels of satisfaction with supervisors, indicating effectiveness of praise/reinforcement by dentists working with them. Promotions were cited as affecting satisfaction and leading to longer job tenure. Short-term training was associated with inability to evaluate performance of self. (Author/SBP)

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FEEDBACK AND JOB SATISFACTION

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A new program has been implemented in the US Army dental care delivery, one which consists of dental treatment teams utilizing dental therapy assistants (DTAs). Both the dentists and the DTAs bring into the program varying expectations and preferences. Where there are significant differences between the expectations and actual performance, conflicts may develop that may result in less than optimal team effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Goodstadt (1974) stated that reality testing of initial expectations is dealt with in the entry phase of an individual's socialization into a new organization. Wanous (1973) and Graen (1974) have documented that unrealistic expectations lead to dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and a lessened feeling of attachment to the organization. The extent of the expectancy disconfirmation has its effect on retention of the individual within the organization. Wanous (1973) showed that realistic job previews produced more realistic job expectations and higher job survival in newly hired female telephone operators.

Scott (1972) reported that job expectancy is an important factor in labor turnover. Employees often terminate their jobs because they lack the opportunity to achieve what they had expected to when hired. Fox, Diamond, and Welsh (1960) reported on the situations which student nurses had indicated as stressful and satisfying, including those elements in the nursing school situation to which students alleged their reasons for withdrawal. Students who disliked nursing indicated it was not what they had expected. Katzell (1968) found that for a large number of first-year

nursing students there was a low but significant negative correlation between withdrawal and confirmation of expectations, especially with respect to satisfactions.

In a study of why physicians stay in the Army, Baker (1969) found that in the group of physicians planning to leave the service, less than one quarter had received much career information, and over one-third felt poorly utilized as professionals. Of those who planned to remain in the Army the major reason was job satisfaction, followed by liking the military. Of numerous recommendations made for improving physician retention, one was that an effective information program be established.

It was predicted that providing Feedback on the results of how frequently a variety of tasks had been performed previously (Phase I) would increase the job satisfaction of the DTAs receiving the Feedback. In addition, it was predicted that there would be an interaction effect with Level-of-Training, and that the Least Field Experience DTAs would be more satisfied with varying aspects of their job as a result of Feedback.

METHOD

Subjects. A total of 306 of 358 DTAs were surveyed in Phase I and 277 of 358 DTAs in Phase II. Table 1 summarizes the demographic data on the DTA samples.

Procedure. The study consisted of two separate phases. Phase I was conducted from October to November 1974 at 24 Continental United States (CONUS) installations that were training dental therapy assistants. Each DTA had his own packet of survey materials. The survey instruments included

biographical and attitude surveys (including the Job Descriptive Index) as well as 20 daily worksheets for recording the daily frequency of performance of a list of procedures that can be accomplished by a DTA. Following the completion of the 20-day recording period, the study materials were sent back to the Academy of Health Sciences for compilation and analysis.

Phase I data from 12 of the installations was compiled. Of the 24 posts, Feedback was sent to 12 even-numbered installations derived from a list of all 24 posts in CONUS. In March 1975 each of the 12 installations was sent a summary report of the Phase I data from their installation. Copies of the summary report were provided to all the DTAs, and the dentists working with the DTAs, at the 12 installations.

Phase II began the end of March 1975 and continued (for some of the 24 installations) into May 1975. Each DTA has his own packet of study materials. The packets were similar to those used in Phase I, including biographical and attitude surveys (including the Job Descriptive Index). Following the completion of the 20-day recording period, the study materials were sent back to the Academy of Health Sciences.

RESULTS

The DTAs' job satisfaction levels on the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, 1969) were broken down by Level-of-Training and whether or not the post received Feedback in preparation for Phase II. In the Phase I results, there were no significant differences on the dependent variables, except for PROMOTIONS, broken down by Level-of-Training. The Ten-to-Eighteen-Month group was significantly more dissatisfied with PROMOTIONS ($F = 5.711$ (2/298); $p = .004$) in Phase I than the other DTAs.

In the Phase II results, the DTAs' job satisfaction responses on the Job Descriptive Index were broken down by Level-of-Training and by Feedback vs. No Feedback. For the dependent variable PAY, there was a significant interaction effect between Level-of-Training and Feedback vs. No Feedback ($F = 3.168$ (2/264); $p = .042$), with the In Training-to-Three-Month group that had received No Feedback (Duncan multiple range test, $p < .05$). In addition, there was a significant main effect for the dependent variable PROMOTIONS broken down by Level-of-Training. As in Phase I, the Ten-to-Eighteen-Month group was significantly more dissatisfied with PROMOTIONS $F = 3.564$ (2/258); $p = .029$) than the other DTAs.

A comparison between Phase I and Phase II results overall revealed significant differences between Phase I and Phase II for SUPERVISOR and PROMOTIONS. DTAs were significantly more satisfied with SUPERVISOR (team dentist) in Phase II than in Phase I ($F = 4.256$ (1/546); $p = .037$). In addition, for the dependent variable PROMOTIONS, there were two significant main effects: DTAs were significantly more dissatisfied in Phase II than in Phase I ($F = 4.668$ (1/546); $p = .029$) and the Ten-to-Eighteen-Month group was significantly more dissatisfied than the other DTAs ($F = 5.586$ (2/546); $p = .004$).

DISCUSSION

The DTAs' job satisfaction levels were higher (as measured by the Job Descriptive Index) than reported for other populations (see Table 2). Locke (1970) suggests that satisfaction is primarily a result of performance. Wanous (1974) further suggests the type of satisfaction, work experience of

the individuals, and the type of job situation must also be considered in any discussion of attitudes and performance.

The DTAs' overall level of satisfaction with SUPERVISOR indicated an increase in satisfaction in Phase II compared with Phase I. It is possible that the DTAs' increased performance in Phase II was reinforced by praise from the dentists, who had more experience (in Phase II) working with DTAs.

The Ten-to-Eighteen-Month DTAs were significantly less satisfied with PROMOTIONS. Overall, DTAs were significantly more dissatisfied in Phase II than in Phase I. When civilian DTAs graduate from training, they are promoted to GS-5; from GS-5 is less opportunity for advancement. The In-Training-to-Three-Month DTAs have promotions to look forward to and report relatively greater satisfaction toward PROMOTIONS. There are relatively few GS-6 positions and, depending upon local post policy, promotions may not be available. Without the incentive of promotions, there is a greater probability of DTAs leaving their job.

Feedback was effective in eliciting significantly greater satisfaction with PAY in the In Training-to-Three-Month group, which reported significantly greater satisfaction than the In Training-to-Three-Month group who received No Feedback. The intent of the Feedback was to provide realistic information about the tasks DTAs are capable of performing, with the objective of creating realistic expectations for the DTAs. The target population was the In Training-to-Three-Month group, who may or may not have enough field experience to adequately evaluate their performance by their own standards.

Table 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON DTAs

PHASE I Number	Level of Training	PHASE II Number
162	In Training-to-3-Months	75
36	4-9 Months	83
107	10-18 Months	116
1	Others	3
306	Total	277
	Military - Civilian Status	
23	Military DTAs	24
280	Civilian DTAs	251
3	Unidentified Others	2
	Sex Breakdown	
38	Male	35
266	Female	242
2	Unidentified	0

Table 2. Selection of Studies using Job Descriptive Index Satisfaction (mean levels).

STUDY	WORK	SUPERVISOR	CO-WRKRS	PAY	PROMOTIONS
Imparato (1972) male & female VA hospital employees	34	40	38-41	8	8-10
Hulin (1966) female clerical workers	35	41	41	15	10
Hulin (1968) female clerical workers	35-36	40-43	41-43	15	10-24
Sarata (1974) male & female employees serving retarded	34-39	39-44	39-45	15-16	10-13

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